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Sociological Approach Regarding the Middle School Age Children's Perception of the Role Played by Physical Education in School

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to argue the necessity for a new methodological orientation regarding the pupils' formative activity, by knowing the middle school age child's perception of the role played by Physical Education. The research hypothesis was constructed from the assumption that the knowledge of the pupils' perception of the importance of Physical Education and Sports, the knowledge of their attitudes, motivations and interests toward this discipline, can constitute a starting point for an intervention aimed to improve the act of teaching. The research consisted in applying a psycho-social questionnaire that had in view the study of the pupils' attitude to and interest in Physical Education conducted in school as part of the curriculum, and outside of school, thus identifying the perception in a school population of the role played by this discipline. The questionnaire, comprising 15 questions with single and multiple choice-type answers, was applied to 150 middle school age pupils from 3 Bacău schools, during the academic year 2011-2012. The data gathered from the subjects have revealed important information regarding the importance of, and the role played by, the motor activities organized as part of the curriculum and outside of it in middle school education, based on which one can form an applicative intervention to improve the education process to meet the European education demands. The analysis of the recorded answers shows the effects of the lesson contents on the pupils' aptitudes and attitudes, as well as the pupils' opinions on the development and organization of the Physical Education lessons, the pupils' behaviour during extracurricular activities, and their desires, options, and aspirations in regards to Physical and Sport Education.

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1. Introduction

Physical education, through "its specific content and tasks, its systemic influences on the individual, in regards to the motor skills, and intellectually, affectively and aesthetically, constitutes itself as a path toward general education" (Dragnea et al., 2006). Physical education, within the context of general education, through its specific content and tasks, contributes to the complete vocational development of the pupils' personalities by enhancing their psycho-motor, functional, intellectual, affective, and aesthetic skills. (Rață, 2004, p. 19) "The physical education and sports conception includes as a whole the beliefs in regards to the role and skills of the physical culture, as component parts of the human personality. Also, this active attitude necessarily demands an interest in physical education and a habit of practicing it. In conclusion, physical education contributes to the achievement of the bio-psychological unity in the human personality, by developing each component of this unity and ensuring there is a harmony between them". (Nicola, 1996).

The modernization of school physical education activities must impose an identification of new strategies, methods, procedures, and means for achieving the new goals of the education through movement of the younger generation, in compliance with a modern society. Thus, the specialists' efforts are directed toward finding new operative ways and methods for improving the physical education and sports teaching-learning-perfecting process in schools. (Cojocariu, 2002, pp. 25-34)

In this context, a new orientation and methodological direction of the physical education lesson is imposed, in the sense of increasing the effort capacity of the body, its adaptation to the conditions of the specific middle school age effort, improving the motor and psycho-motor skills and modelling the attitude of the pupil.

2. Material and methods

The *aim* of this research is to argue the necessity for a new methodological orientation regarding the pupils' formative activity, by knowing the middle school age child's perception of the role played by physical education.

The *research hypothesis* was constructed from the assumption that the knowledge of the pupils' opinions, of their attitudes, motivations, and interests toward physical education, can constitute a starting point for an intervention aimed at improving the act of teaching.

The *research methods* used were: the study of the bibliographical material, the observation, the inquiry, the statistical-mathematical method and the graphical representation method.

The research consisted in applying a psycho-social questionnaire that had in view the study of the pupils' attitude to and interest in physical education in school conducted as part of the curriculum and outside of it. The questionnaire comprised 15 questions, with closed and multiple-option answers, and was applied to a group of 150 middle school pupils. For a better relevance of the results, the target group was selected from 3 schools, from various parts of the city of Bacau: Middle school no. 10, the "Al. Ioan Cuza" School and the "Constantin Platon" School.

The application of the sociological inquiry, in May-June 2012, helped us gain information about the pupils and their opinions at the end of the academic year, regarding:

- the importance of physical education and sport;
- their priorities, needs and interests in regard to the physical and sports activities;
- the content and the teaching methodology of physical education and sports;
- the effects that the practice of physical exercises has on their bodies;
- their attitudes, motivation, interests, dispositions and inclinations regarding the physical education and sports activities in middle school;
- the systematic and independent practice of physical exercise during their leisure time;
- the assessment methods for this discipline.

3. Results

Based on the inquiry results, the teaching contents and their methodology were orientated for this age category. From the answers recorded for the first question, one can see that 113 (75.34%) of the questioned pupils think that physical education is just as important as the other subjects, while 13 (8.66%) believe that it is not that important and 24 (16%) say they do not know. (Fig.1). To the second question, 117 (78%) of the subjects answered that they participate in every physical education class, 21 (14%) quite often, 9 (6%) sometimes, and 3 (2%) almost never. (Fig.2).

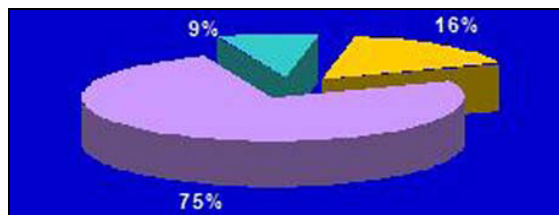


Fig. 1 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 1

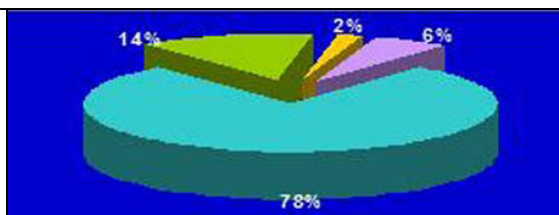


Fig. 2 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 2

To the third question: *"If you were medically excused, taking into consideration the seriousness of your condition, do you think it would be good for you to restart practicing physical exercises?"*, the pupils' opinions were as follows: 124 (82.66%) are for restarting practicing physical exercises, 5 (3.34%) think it would not be a good thing, and 21 (14%) are undecided. (Fig. 3).

To the question asking the pupils the reasons why they participate in the physical education lesson, 52.66% of them expressed their enjoyment of the physical activities, 20% participate only because it is necessary, 11.34% because presence is mandatory, and 16% because they like the physical education teacher. (Fig. 4).

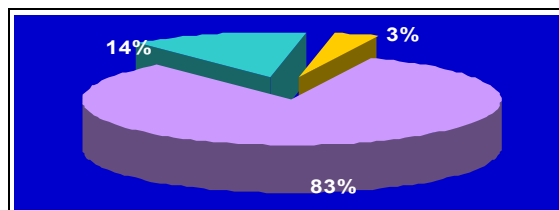


Fig. 3 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 3

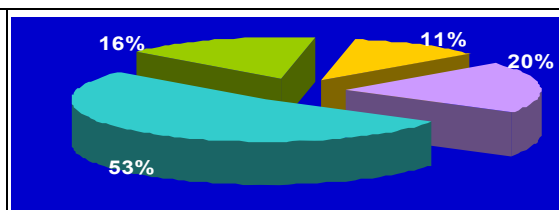


Fig. 4 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 4

The next question asked the subjects to assess the physical education lessons. According to the answers, 54 (36%) of the pupils think they are "necessary," 36 (24%) "monotonous," 30 (20%) "attractive," 12 (8%) "difficult," and 18 (12%) said the physical education lessons are "easy". (Fig 5)

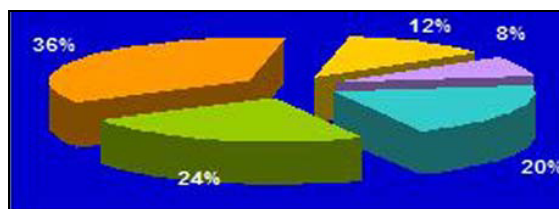


Fig. 5 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 5



Fig. 6 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 6

To the sixth question: "Do you think that the number of hours allocated to physical education in middle school is enough?" most subjects 121 (80.66%) are not happy with the frequency of these lessons, 15 (10%) said yes, 3 (2%) said partially, while 11 (7.34%) said the number is insufficient. (Fig 6)



Fig. 7 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 7

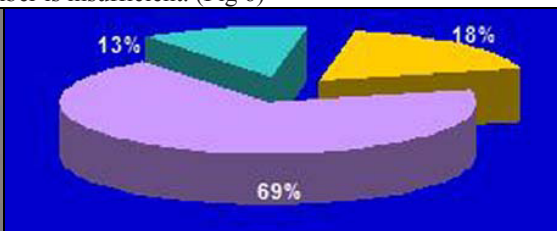


Fig. 8 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 8

To the seventh question, 70 (46.66%) of the subjects said the playing contents of the lesson are attractive, 41 (27.34%) said partially, 24 (16%) said no, and 15 (10%) said "I don't know". (Fig. 7).

The next question asked "What is your preferred means of teaching the motor contents during the physical education lessons?" and the pupils answered: 103 (68.66%) - "movement games"; 27 (18%) "applicative tracks"; 20 (13.34%) - "methodical structures". (Fig. 8).

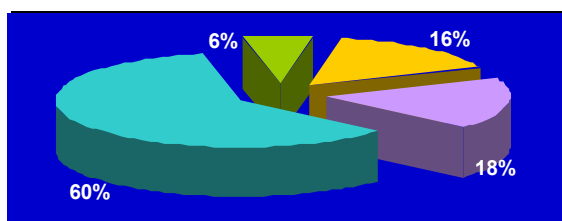


Fig. 9 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 9

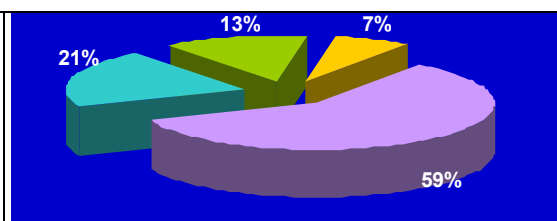


Fig. 10 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 10

To the next question, 24 (16%) of the subjects answered that they want "control drills" as assessment method, 27 (18%) prefer the assessment of the "accomplished progress," 90 (60%) the assessment of the "effort during class," and 9 (6%) would prefer to be assessed based on "presence". (Fig. 9).

In regards to the participation of the questioned pupils in extracurricular activities, 31 (20.66%) of them answered that they do not take part in any other form of physical activity, 13.34% are a part of a school team, 7.34% participate in sports activities organized by professional sports clubs and 58.66% of the subjects perform leisure time physical activities. (Fig. 10).

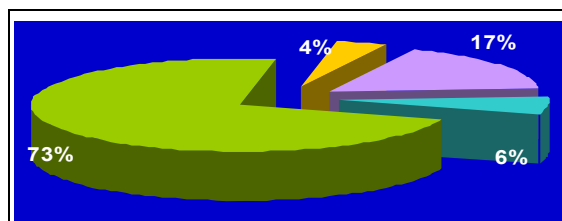


Fig. 11 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 11

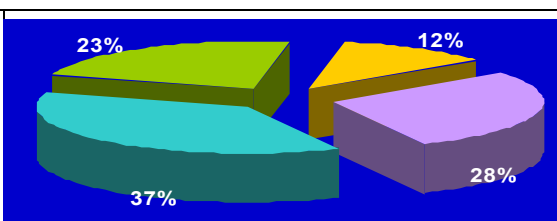


Fig. 12 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 12

Asked to identify the most important aims of physical education, the middle school pupils answered as

follows: 73.34% of them recreational, 16.66% instructive-educational, 6% integrative, and 4% educational. (Fig. 11). The next item asked the subjects to identify the beneficial effects physical education can have on the human body, the answers highlighting the role it played in a harmonious physical development 56 (37.34%), "health fortification" 42 (28%), "compensation of intellectual effort" 34 (22.66%), and in "increasing the immune resistance" 18 (12%) (Fig. 12).



Fig. 13 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 13

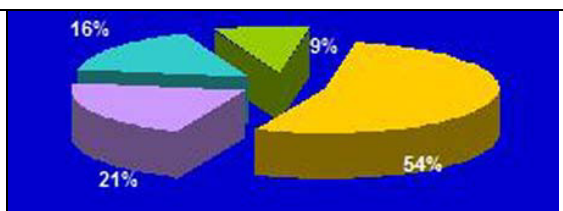


Fig. 14 Graphical representation of the pupils' answers to the question no. 14

The next question asked the pupils to assess the formative character of the taught motor content, in regards to the skills and attitudes: 51 (34%) of the subjects consider the specific sports skills to be useful, 39 (26%) the acquired personality traits, 32 (21.34%) the openness toward socialization, and 28 (18.66%) the acquired knowledge about the physical education activity. (Fig. 13).

Asked to identify sports that they like playing during the physical education lessons, 54% of the subjects said they prefer track and field drills, 21.34% aerobic gymnastics, 16% table tennis, and 8.66% acrobatic gymnastics. (Fig. 14). In regards to the team sports preferred by the pupils, present in the physical education lessons, we have the following answers: 72 (48%) of the subjects prefer handball, 45 (30%) basketball, 18 (12%) volleyball, 15 (10%) soccer.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the answers highlights the pupils' priorities and needs, their opinions regarding the development and organisation of physical education lessons, their behavior and manifestations in the extracurricular and independent athletic activities, their attitudes toward the content of the lessons, their desires, options and aspirations regarding physical education and sports. The teaching of physical education in middle school must be done according to the pupils' motivations, interests and aptitudes; this being a viable way to create the possibility of a certain improvement of the didactic process.

Middle school physical education must be directed toward the social integration of pupils, in compliance with the demands imposed by the development of society. In this context, it can directly and effectively contribute to the increase of the population's bio-motor and spiritual potential.

Physical education can stimulate, through its objectives, the harmonious development of the body, its psycho-motor development, the fortification of the pupils' health, and an increase in their working and intellectual abilities. It influences the natural growth of the body, stimulating the psycho-motor skills; it teaches certain sports branches to the pupils, forming a habit of systematic practice of physical exercise. (Dobrescu, & Dumitru, 2007, pp. 76-89).

The information gathered from the questioned subjects has shown important aspects regarding this phenomenon, on the basis of which an applicative intervention would improve the process of education through the means of Physical Education, in compliance with the demands of a European education.

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